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HAIR: A Discussion of Performative American Masculinities

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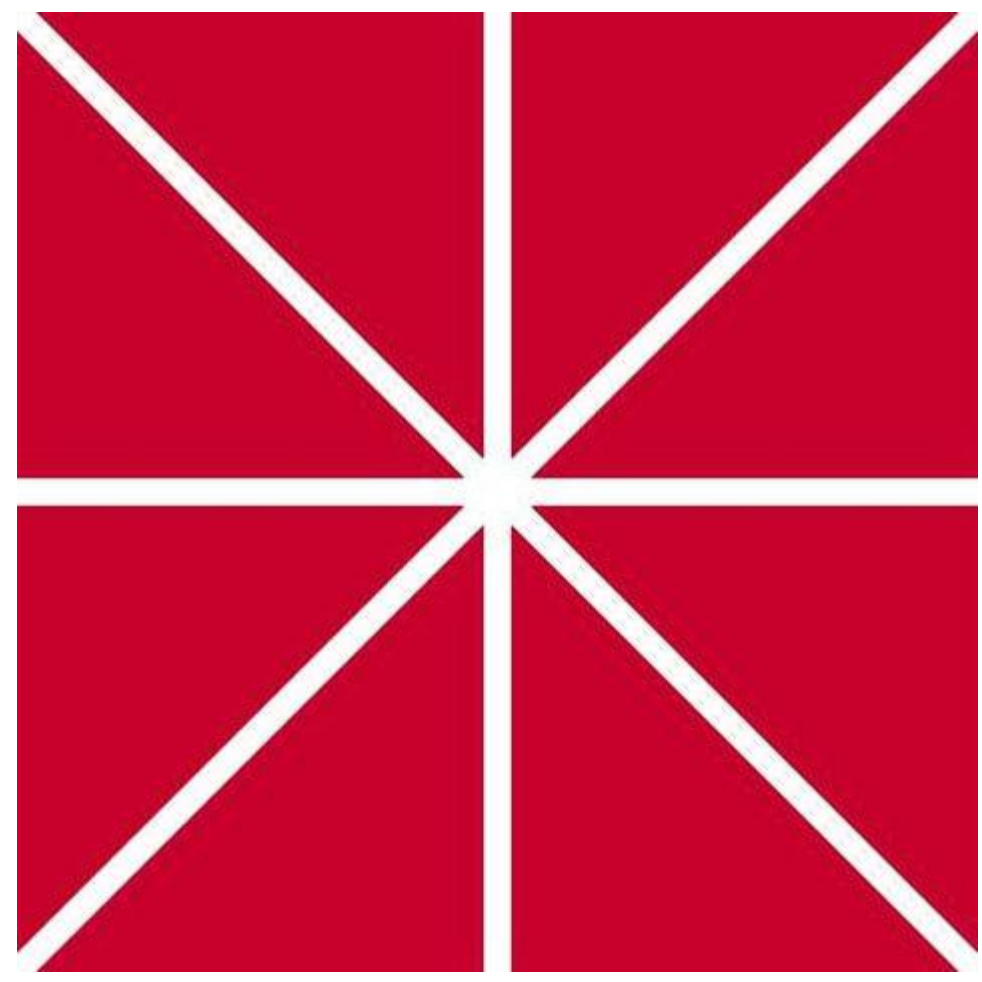


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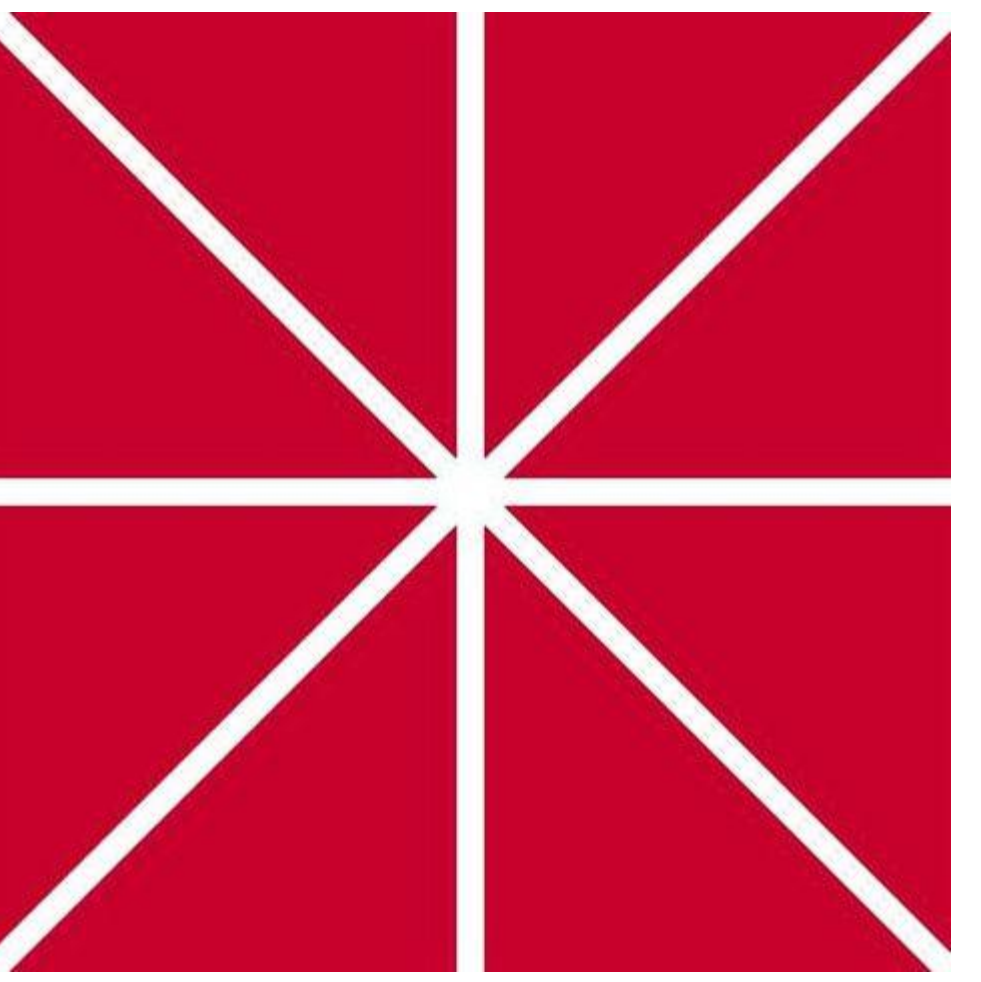
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HAIR: A Discussion of Performative American Masculinities

Adam Lee

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Artistic Influences

Although my training in the arts at Chapman University is primarily within the constructs of the Department of Theatre, I have found that much of my artistic works draw on my interdisciplinary experiences. Through minoring in Gay and Lesbian Studies, and taking courses with the Department of Art, my concepts of performance often transcend that of a traditional theatre-going experience, where audience pays to sit and see a production. That being said, many of my influences come from artists and academics who do the same.

Judith Butler, a philosopher and gender theorist, has always been a heavy influence on my perception of gender, her writings talking on the notion that gender is a constructed performance. Although Butler's work is primarily a comparison and analysis of women, masculinity studies have been unable to escape her ideas of gender performativity. Butler creates this illusion of heterosexual integrity by connecting her thoughts about a true identity of the self through the manifestation of a core identity; a congruence between gender performance, identity, and and other.

Artists who have inspired me range from performance artist and drag persona Amanda LePore, with her plays on gender and femininity, Luke Austin, a photographer who challenges the roles of masculinity in his photographs, and Jeremy Kost, a photographer who captures the past and present with his double exposure polaroids that engage the audience with questions about male beauty aesthetics.

References

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999. Print.

"Jeremy Kost." *Jeremy Kost*. Web. 06 Nov. 2014.

Connell, Raewyn. *Masculinities*. Berkeley, CA: U of California, 2005. Print.

"I have a tendency to experience objects as if they have personalities," he continues. "For instance, if there are three scrub brushes, one might seem like the father, one the mother, and the other the child. It's comparable to the way people relate to pets -- and needless to say, it has the potential of blossoming into full-blown neurosis."

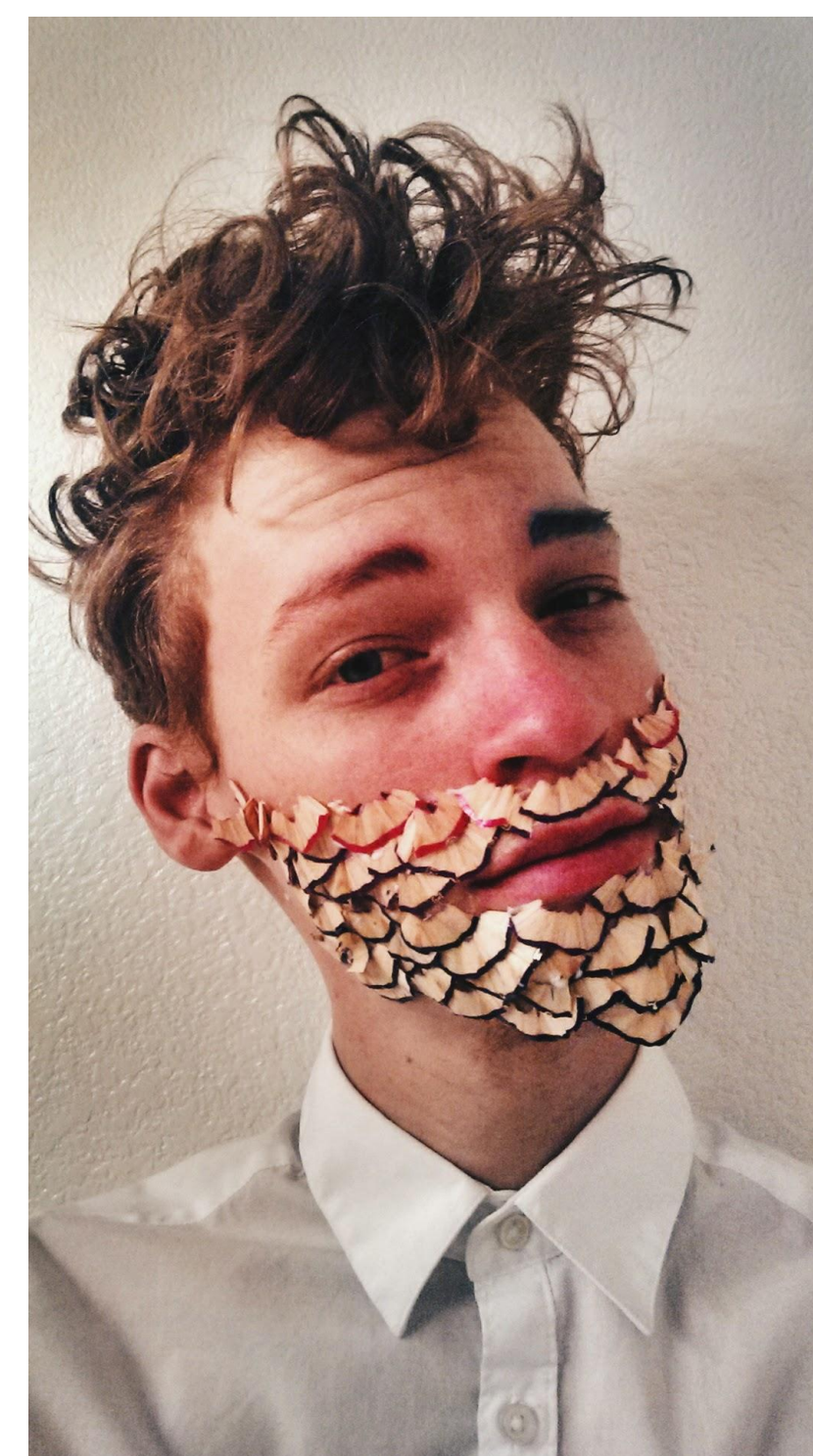
- Robert Therrien, artnet.com



Overview

The presence of male facial and body hair is not a fad that has simply come to the forefront of men's grooming standards in a few short years, it has a history. No matter the social, political, or economic status of the male, his identity can (and has) been expressed through hair.

In "Hair: An Analysis of Masculine Aesthetics", I examine the history of the performance of masculinity and the grooming standards that have grown to father the traditions of male beauty throughout the United States. While showing ever-changing development of hair and how it is presented, I propose a few questions to men of the twenty-first century: what purpose does hair serve for men today, what defines the lines between beauty and transgression of hair, and what does today's understanding of hair look like in comparison to its history? Through use of contemporary men's magazines like GQ who publish body grooming tips and tricks, historical analysis of the physical aesthetics of former leaders in Western society, and the plethora of media that dictates how male grooming standards, I plan to construct a contemporary portrait of hair by creating faux, male-constructed beards that will be photographed on men as an iconically ironic blend of masculinity. These portraits will be artistic interpretations of hair throughout its history.



Cultural Relevance and Conclusion

Reflecting back on this process, I feel as if I have come so far from where I began. In the beginning I was selfish, in a sense. I was mainly focussed on analyzing my own masculinity, my own performances, my own influences. By sharing my works with other people, it allowed me to not only further understand my own ideas about gender and identity, but help me to articulate these ideas to others as well as learn from their views. The experience of engaging with men and discussing their perception of masculinity has been beyond enriching, more so than I had ever imagined.

By working with such provoking materials, or creating an image that is memorable, these beards allowed me to strike up conversations with people I never thought that I would have talked to. I found myself, in my personal and work life, talking about body image and masculinity to complete strangers that I would run in to. I learned that some men simply don't agree with the idea that they are giving in to this conversation of male beauty aesthetics and expectations by growing a beard, and that sometimes that ignorance is blissful. I even met one guy who answered something along the lines of, "I keep growing my own beard for the men out there who can't grow one, I feel like I owe it to them," when I asked why he had facial hair.

The image of masculinity has forever changed. Years ago men with beards could have been written off as less professional, juvenile, haggard. But now, men are praised for their outward display of masculinity and are pressured by society to conform to this image of the American, masculine man.